



## Masaki Iwase, President and CEO of Celine Japan



### Celine Japan has reached and even exceeded the country's 2.2% legal requirement of people with disabilities in the workplace. Why was it important to go above and beyond what's required by law?

At first, it was a matter of following the rules, of making sure to avoid government penalties and potential damage to our brand's image. But what started as mere legal compliance has turned into something much bigger: we soon realized how important it was to strive for equal opportunity for all. It's much different to hear about the lives of people with disabilities and to have people with disabilities be part of our teams. It was a real eye-opener to learn first-hand about their experiences, their day-to-day lives... It wasn't easy at first – there was and still is much to learn and to embrace – and it took some time to figure things out. We had to adapt and adjust, to be flexible and caring.

### How did you go about including people with disabilities?

It was something very new to us so I started by making a statement to the whole company explaining how and why we were going to welcome people with disabilities in our team. Then I made sure that line managers went slowly, step-by-step, to ensure that people with disabilities fit in well. Sometimes, when there was a gap between our expectations and the actual performance, we fine-tuned to make things work. For instance, one of our new employees with disabilities had no experience at all working in an office and didn't know how to use a computer. We made sure that he received the proper professional training. At the end of the end, all the managerial actions implemented benefit the whole team.

### How do you respond to those that think that people with disabilities need extra care?

In the beginning, many in our company must have felt that way. But to dispel the fear of the unknown, there's nothing as powerful as facing the reality. So, we welcomed people with disabilities and, lo and behold, what seemed unusual at first quickly became something quite ordinary. When I look at my team today, it's such a pleasure to have people with disabilities among us, feeling happy. We all appreciate working with people that come from different backgrounds – people that have different stories – regardless of their medical conditions. Our duty of care is not limited to people with disabilities. We care for every one of our employees.

### Why is it important to work on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace?

Working on diversity and inclusion as a whole is a very impactful experience that has numerous positive outcomes for our company, our teams, our business. We benefit from our people with disabilities employees' point of view. I think that, at first, the people with disabilities that came in were probably afraid to talk about the adjustments that needed to be made for them to do their work, out of fear of losing their jobs or not meeting our expectations. But they quickly opened up about their needs and the changes that should be made to fit their needs. And they went further than that, they made suggestions on how to improve the way we work. Overall, they offer very positive and constructive feedback!

## Gena Smith, SVP, Human Resources, Head of Global Executive and Creative Recruitment at LVMH Inc.



### LVMH supports Runway of Dreams, a non-profit organization that works toward inclusion of people with disabilities in the fashion industry. What's the story behind Runway of Dreams?

Its founder, Mindy Scheier, is a fashion designer whose son is a wheelchair user. One day he told her how frustrated he was not to be able to wear jeans like other boys. Because he couldn't manage zippers, he had to wear sweatpants all the time, which made him feel excluded from his friends. Mindy spent all night tearing up a pair of jeans to make him an adaptable piece of clothing. That was a defining moment for her. As a fashion designer, she understood the power of fashion to make people feel good in their own skin. But only then did she realize that millions of people with disabilities were probably struggling like her son to find fashionable clothing that fit their needs. With Runway of Dreams, she set out to change the way the fashion industry looks at people with disabilities, to lead the conversation around true inclusivity of these people around the world. Runway of Dreams also works with a number of incredible companies to develop an adaptive fashion and footwear line.

### Why is it key for LVMH to change the way fashion looks at people with disabilities?

It's in line with our diversity and inclusion mission to create opportunities for all our customers and employees around the world. It's important to remember that people with disabilities are the largest minority in the world with over 1 billion people. And people with disabilities are no different than other people: they want to look and feel good, to experience beautiful products; they dress up, wear cosmetics and fragrances... Many of them already feel different because of their disability. They don't want this feeling exacerbated by patronized brands. They want to be treated equally, to be treated like everyone else. And fashion has the power to remove stigma by transforming the way people look and feel, by giving them confidence. We want to shine a light on this and connect with an audience we haven't really spoken to before. It's also a great business opportunity.

### The adaptive clothing market is on rise. In 2019 it was valued around \$300 billion globally. It shows without a doubt that disability and style are not mutually exclusive.

Why would one assume that people with disabilities are not interested in fashion or beauty? They, too, want to participate in the cultural zeitgeist. They, too, feel empowered by fashion and beauty products. Take Kaitlyn Dobrow, for instance. She's a beauty vlogger who had to have all her limbs amputated when she was 18 because of bacterial meningitis. Kaitlyn talks about how putting on make-up was the first thing she wanted to learn to do when she got her prosthetic arms. I quite frankly think that it's fashion that so far hasn't paid attention to individuals with disabilities. Today, we see the success of the brands that do care – the brands that designed adaptive apparel – and the incredible loyalty of their customers.

### From an HR standpoint, why is it important to fight bias and stereotypes towards people with disabilities?

There is a fear of the unknown and we're all very quick to make assumptions. We all have these unconscious biases, and it's perfectly normal, but we need to be aware that we have them in order to fight them. As an organization, we need to be more open-minded and curious. We need to have more exchanges with people with disabilities to better understand them and their needs. We need to be willing to make adaptations, to work on aligning them with the right jobs, provide them with training and support. This commitment is worth it: what you get back in return is truly extraordinary.

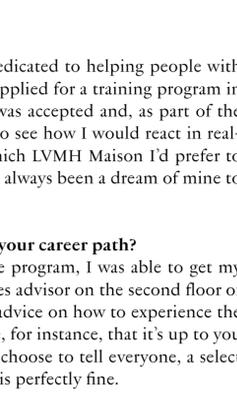
### How so?

All you have to do is look at the success of Sephora which has a long history of employing people with disabilities in their distribution centers. The results, backed by years of data, are clear: a higher productivity rate, a lower absentee rate and extremely high levels of reliability and performance. It shouldn't come as a surprise: most people with disabilities tend to be really hardworking, driven and passionate about their work. It might be because of the obstacles that they face make them resilient, dedicated, with a great fortitude to conquer life every single day.

### How did working with Runway of dreams change LVMH's employees outlook on people with disabilities?

In multiple ways! One example, among many: for the Runway of dreams fashion show, we brought make-up artists from our brands to do the make-up for people with disabilities models, to make them feel more beautiful than ever. All our artists got to spend some time with the models and got to know them. After the event, they told us it was one of the most moving and profound experience they ever had. And that they'd do it every year!

## Stéphane Moula, Personal shopper VIC at Le Bon Marché



### How did you join LVMH?

Through Mission Handicap LVMH, an organization dedicated to helping people with disabilities to find work opportunities in the group, I applied for a training program in sales at LVMH called EXCELLhanCE. My application was accepted and, as part of the recruitment process, I was invited Avenue Montaigne to see how I would react in real-life situations. At the end of the day I was asked in which LVMH Maison I'd prefer to work. Without hesitation I said "Le Bon Marché". It had always been a dream of mine to work there.

### What role played the EXCELLhanCE LVMH program in your career path?

It helped me rise quickly in the Maison. Thanks to the program, I was able to get my degree (a vocational diploma in sales) and become a sales advisor on the second floor of Le Bon Marché. EXCELLhanCE also gave me precious advice on how to experience the workplace as a person with disabilities. They taught me, for instance, that it's up to you whether you talk about your disability or not. You can choose to tell everyone, a select few, or only those who really need to know. Either way is perfectly fine.

### How did you become a personal shopper?

I've always known that was the job made for me! A year after I joined Le Bon Marché, I entered the École Boucicaut – the Maison's internal training school – with that specific goal in mind. At the time, there was no official personal shopping department at Le Bon Marché. I had the pleasure to see this great adventure come true. Today, I'm part of team of 12 people that operates from the top floor of the store: 300m<sup>2</sup> of "salons particuliers" that used to be the founder's, Aristide Boucicaut, office.

### Do you think your disability hampered your career?

Not at all. Without the LVMH Mission Handicap and EXCELLhanCE program\*, I wouldn't be where I am today. I couldn't have worked my way up like I did. There is nothing shameful about having a disability. You can have one and be the most upbeat and sparkling person ever. And if one of your colleagues doesn't understand why you won't do a specific task, just explain that you have a medical condition. My colleagues know what to do if I have one of my asthma or allergy attacks. They don't panic if, all of a sudden, I have a hard time breathing and my lips turn into Kim Kardashian's!

### What would you say to people with disabilities that want to work in the luxury?

If you think you're up to it, go for it! Don't hide behind your disability, don't let it become an obstacle between you and your dreams. When they learn about your disability, most people will do whatever they can to make sure you feel fine, to make it easier for you. There is more empathy and kindness than you think. Most people are not judgmental.

### How do you respond to those that think people with disabilities don't belong in luxury?

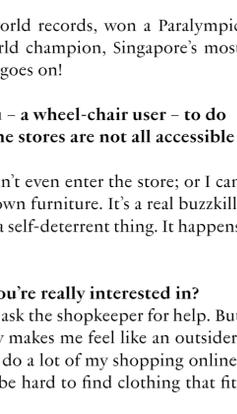
That they couldn't be more wrong. Just as anyone can enjoy luxury items, anyone can work in luxury. I strongly believe that sales advisors shouldn't all be models but ordinary people like myself. We should be as diverse as our customers. My clients often tell me that they're happy to be dealing with "real" people. When they don't feel comfortable in their skin because of their love handles, I can say "look, I've got the same!".

### How can a person with disabilities thrive in the workplace?

I think you should own your disability and not try to overcome it. Know your limits, don't try to go beyond them, and you will develop your talents and skills to reach excellence. Stay in your safe space and shine as bright as you can there. When the escalators are out of order and I have to bring five very heavy coats to the top floor, for instance, I know I won't be able to do it. So, I don't even try to. Either I take three and go back down for the remaining two, or I ask a colleague for help. I also think that it's key to really love what you do. I LOVE my job. I feel so great here and always come to work with a smile on my face. In the morning, I dress to impress, get to my theater (that's how I view Le Bon Marché), step on the stage and start my daily show. I love entertaining customers! And I think that that when they choose me as their personal shopper, it's my larger than life personality that draw them in.

\*The LVMH EXCELLhanCE program is designed to help job seekers with disabilities pursue new career opportunities

## Theresa Gob, Paralympic Medalist and Client



### You recently retired after a long and successful career as a pro athlete. What are some of your key achievements?

I swam for 20 years during which I set a couple of world champions, won a Paralympic bronze medal, became Singapore's first swimming world champion, Singapore's most bemedaled athlete at the ASEAN Para Games... The list goes on!

### Yet, despite your amazing career, it can be tough for you – a wheel-chair user – to do something as ordinary as in-person shopping because the stores are not all accessible to people with disabilities. It must be frustrating!

Yes, it is. A lot of times the aisles are so narrow that I can't even enter the store; or I can get in but can't maneuver and worry about knocking down furniture. It's a real buzzkill. If I spot that I can't enter on my own, I just go away. It's a self-deterrent thing. It happens often.

### What if you notice in the window display an item that you're really interested in?

If I really want the item, I wouldn't put it past myself to ask the shopkeeper for help. But it's hard. When I can't enter a store on my own, that's really makes me feel like an outsider, like I'm not welcome. It's very off-putting. That's why I do a lot of my shopping online. It's much easier, even if it has its pros and cons. It can be hard to find clothing that fit, and troublesome to send it back when it doesn't.

### Do you think that an exceptional service in a luxury store can compensate for a lack of accessibility?

No, I don't think that it is enough because it still means that people with disabilities receive different treatment. To me, luxury is all about comfort and peace of mind, about feeling important and at ease. So, accessibility is a prerequisite. If the store is not accessible enough, there is a literal barrier to entry for people with disabilities.

### What do you think about the Casa Loewe store – one of the most accessible concepts store in luxury – that just opened in Singapore?

I was pleasantly surprised by the new Casa Loewe. It is colorful and really spacious. It felt cozy and warm. When I entered the store, I noticed that a lot of the items were placed lower, which made them more reachable and accessible to me. Even though carpet can be seen as a sign of luxury, as a wheelchair user it's my worst enemy. In the Casa Loewe store I could move pretty easily: the carpet that was there was placed strategically, it didn't feel like a hindrance. All in all, I had a really lovely time in the store. For a small amount of time, it felt like I was with friends and family. I would love to come back and visit again.

### What should every luxury retail store be doing in order to enhance the experience of people with disabilities?

If you're looking at targeting a certain group of people, you should include these people in your project from the start so that you end up with what they really need, not what you think they need. In other words, to work on inclusive design for people with disabilities you have to consult people with disabilities. Let's take for instance the topic of accessibility: it's not about making the entire space accessible to all – I may need space and lower counters, somebody else might need audio description or someone to guide them... – it's about providing opportunities and options so that you make the space as accessible as you can. I think luxury stores, more than any others types of stores, have a lot of potential to create these accessible spaces. It's not going to be perfect the first time but you have to make this first step and go forward from there, in a continual improvement process. Because of the work we've done, it's already much better today than it was 10 years ago!

